

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. A method for providing information on a plurality of users to a plurality of requestors over the Internet, comprising:
 - 3 storing information on the plurality of users in a database and associating the information with a plurality of keys;
 - 5 receiving a request for information on a particular user from one of the requestors over the Internet;
 - 7 determining a key associated with the request, the key being stored as a cookie on a machine of the particular user;
 - 9 using the key associated with the request to retrieve the information on that particular user from the database; and
 - 11 forwarding the information on that particular user to the one requestor over the Internet.

- 1 2. The method as set forth in claim 1, wherein storing information comprises associating a different key for information on each user.
- 1 3. The method as set forth in claim 1, wherein storing information comprises storing multiple sets of information for at least some of the users with each set of information being associated with a different key.

1 4. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising checking that the one
2 requestor is authorized to obtain the information on that particular user.

1 5. The method as set forth in claim 4, wherein checking comprises receiving from
2 the requestor a user-supplied password.

1 6. The method as set forth in claim 1, wherein forwarding comprises sending the
2 information in XML format.

1 7. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising receiving new
2 information on the user from the requestor and updating the database with the new
3 information.

1 8. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising selecting an available
2 key for a user and supplying the new key to a requestor so that the requestor can store the
3 new key as a cookie on a user's machine.

1 9. A method of obtaining information on users, comprising:
2 receiving over the Internet a request from a user's machine;
3 retrieving a cookie from the user's machine;
4 obtaining a key stored as part of the cookie;

5 sending a query over the Internet for data associated with that key, the query including
6 the key retrieved from the cookie; and
7 receiving the data associated with key, wherein the data includes information on the
8 user.

1 10. The method as set forth in claim 9, wherein receiving the data comprises
2 receiving the data in XML format.

1 11. The method as set forth in claim 9, further comprising receiving a password
2 from the user and sending the query includes sending the password.

1 12. The method as set forth in claim 9, further comprising using the data on the
2 user in responding to the user's request.

1 13. The method as set forth in claim 9, wherein retrieving the cookie comprises
2 retrieving a plurality of cookies from the user's machine.

1 14. The method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising receiving a request from
2 a second user's machine, checking for a cookie on the second user's machine, sending a
3 query for an available key when the second user's machine does not contain any cookie, and
4 placing the cookie with the available key on the second user's machine.

1 15. The method as set forth in claim 9, further comprising obtaining new
2 information on the user and sending the new information and the key over the Internet.

1 16. A system for storing information on a plurality of users and for providing the
2 information to a plurality of requestors, comprising:

3 a database for storing information on the plurality of users and for associating the
4 information with a plurality of keys;

5 a web server for receiving a request over the Internet from one of the requestors for
6 information on a particular user, the request including a key stored as part of a cookie on a
7 user's machine;

8 a retrieval unit for receiving the key and for retrieving the information associated with
9 that key;

10 wherein web server obtains the information from the retrieval unit and forwards the
11 information on the particular user to the requestor.

1 17. The system as set forth in claim 16, further comprising a key assignor for
2 assigning available keys to new users in the database.

1 18. The system as set forth in claim 16, further comprising an update unit for
2 storing new information on users in the database.

1 19. The system as set forth in claim 16, further comprising a verifier for verifying
2 that the requestor is authorized to receive the information on the particular user.

1 20. The system as set forth in claim 16, wherein the web server forward the
2 information on the particular user to the requestor in XML format.